BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Abel Medeiros

"When I first started, I got fifty-five cents a day. And the only reason I got fifty-five cents was my younger brother, the one next to me, was getting fifty cents. Because he was younger, he got five cents less. It wasn't because I was a better worker or anything else, it was just because I was older, you see, they gave me a little bit more, five cents a day more. My mother would say that I ate more than (laughs) I brought home."

Abel Medeiros is the eighth of ten children born to John Medeiros, Jr. and Mary Costa Medeiros. His great grandfather, Louis Medeiros, immigrated to Hawai'i in 1878 from St. Michael, Portugal. Born in 'Ōma'o Homesteads, where Abel's father was one of the original homesteaders, Abel commuted by horseback to Kōloa School. While attending school, he worked first in the sugar fields of McBryde Sugar Company, then in the Kaua'i Pineapple Company cannery in Lāwai.

After graduating from Kaua'i High School in 1939, Abel began working in the office of McBryde Sugar Company. After a stint in the military during World War II, he returned to McBryde. In 1947, Abel worked as a recruiting officer for the Hawai'i National Guard.

In 1952, Abel joined Kaua'i Pineapple Company and became assistant personnel director. Eleven years later, he returned to McBryde Sugar Company to become their industrial relations assistant, remaining in that position until his retirement in 1985.

Abel, a Republican, ran for a seat in the state House of Representatives in 1959; he served four years in the legislature. Between 1970 and 1974, he served on the Kaua'i County Council.

Abel today lives in Po'ipū.

Tape No. 15-15-1-87

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Abel Medeiros (AM)

April 8, 1987

Kōloa, Kaua'i

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

[Note: Interview is taking place at the Kōloa home of Richard "Ike" Okamura.]

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Abel Medeiros on April 8, 1987 in Kōloa. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, why don't you tell me first, where and when you were born.

AM: Well, I was born on March 7, 1920, that's sixty-seven years ago, at 'Ōma'o Homesteads. Of course, the place is also known as Piwai, P-I-W-A-I. My birth certificate shows that. And it's only about, oh, three miles from Kōloa town, the homesteads.

WN: What was your father [John Medeiros, Jr.] doing over there?

AM: Well, my father was with the McBryde Sugar Company originally as timekeeper for the whole plantation, and then his remaining years on the plantation, he became the camp police and did all the checking of the camps, the people not going to work, and whatnot. Sort of like a community relations man of the plantation. Sometimes they handle the sports programs, and then later on they got a sports director for McBryde. But, he spent fifty years with McBryde Sugar [1907-1957]. And then my grandfather also worked for McBryde. And I worked for McBryde.

WN: So who was the original homesteader in your family?

AM: Oh, my father.

WN: Your father?

AM: Yes. My father as a young man---when they opened the homesteads, the 'Ōma'o Homestead, my father was, oh, one of eight or ten, I think, that got homesteads up there. Yeah, there weren't that many homesteads.

WN: Did he tell you about when he got it?

AM: No, I don't recall the date. But, I was born in a house in the homestead. In fact I think my brother Daniel who is now seventy-three or seventy-four was the last one that was born in a house other than the property we owned. My father first---well, when they got it homesteaded they had to grow cane. They had a contract to grow cane for McBryde. So we grew sugarcane. And then when McBryde stopped taking cane from the homesteaders, my father then leased our property for pineapples in the early '30s. Yeah, it was in the early '30s because I was still in grammar school and high school. And then after the pineapples went sour, then we raised cattle.

WN: So leased to McBryde for pineapple?

AM: No, no. We leased the property to a fellow by the name of Chinen. He was a pineapple grower. He lived in Lāwa'i, I think, at that time. So, he had quite a few properties in 'Ōma'o that he leased from the homesteaders for pineapple.

WN: So of the original homesteaders with your father, were they all Portuguese?

AM: Yes, yes. The only other Hawaiian who was over there was the Piimoku family. And then [Antone] Vasconcellos was, the wife was Hawaiian, but then the rest were most of them Portuguese. Because then up above near the highway. . . . May have been one Puerto Rican, the Rodrigues, Old Man [Antone] Rodrigues. And the [John] Gonzalves, other big family that was up there, but they came later. There was not too much acreage. So, that's basically what 'Ōma'o was like.

WN: So then all of the homesteaders followed the same pattern, they started with sugar . . .

AM: Sugar, yeah, they all grew cane for McBryde at that time. I don't know of anyone that grew cane for Kōloa Sugar unless they lived in Kōloa. But the homesteaders---because my father was working for McBryde, I guess, you know, they gave the cane to McBryde. And his uncle, my father's uncle, Frank Medeiros, lived in Kalāheo. He was sort of in charge of the homestead cane. He sort of coordinated the homesteaders' cane, you know. 'Cause right above our place at 'Ōma'o, there used to be the derrick and everything where they used to load the cane when they brought it in by carts and then load it into the cane cars. [There was] the narrow gauge train tracks that came all the way to Kōloa, all the way down to Kukui'ula and then to McBryde, following the 'Ōma'o Road, the old road. That road was paved in the mid-'20s. Because before that it was just unimproved road.

WN: Did the railroad stop near there?

AM: Where?

WN: Your place.

AM: Yeah, it went further up. Not too much up. Till the place known as the black gate, which was, oh, about 500 yards above that. It stopped, and that was the last homestead. That was the last homestead up there.

WN: How big was your father's property originally?

AM: Well, he had two parcels--two areas--he had about twenty-something acres. Because I think the homesteads were twenty acres. But my father had one parcel, one large parcel, about thirteen, fourteen acres, and then he acquired my grandmother's place. My grandmother died and my mother [Mary Costa Medeiros] got it. So, he had twenty acres total. In fact I still got about eight of that.

WN: So what generation are you?

AM: Fourth.

WN: Fourth?

AM: Fourth, the Medeiros side.

WN: So your father's name was . . .

AM: John.

WN: John Junior.

AM: John Junior, mm hmm. And my brother's John the third. My grandfather was John Senior, and my great-grandfather was Louis Medeiros.

WN: Do you know anything about him [Louis Medeiros] or what year he came or anything like that?

AM: Yeah. Well, he came in 1878. And apparently, when he came he was already little bit on the old side so he had to lie--oh, I shouldn't say lie his age--he gave an age younger. He died at 103 here in Koloa, right back here. In fact he's buried at our cemetery. And he was the one that made three coffins and never used it. (Chuckles) It all went to his children. And when we were kids, I was maybe five years old, we'd go down there and we wouldn't even dare run around the house. We'd get in there and sit down and he'd just point up to the rafters, that's where the black coffin was. Say, "I put you in there." And nobody (laughs) run. Yeah, he was a very strict old man. Well, so was my grandfather and my father. They were very strict.

WN: What about you? Are you strict?

AM: No, no, I'm not strict. I like things done properly, but I'm not strict with my children. When I tell them to do something, I expect them to do it, you know, because when I was told to do it, I get it

done. But I think my kids get it a lot easier. My grandchildren got it much more easier than anybody else.

WN: So your great-grandfather was from the [Portuguese] islands?

AM: Yes. My great-grandfather came from St. Michael, in Portugal.

WN: Madeira?

AM: No, well. Yeah, St. Michael is an island off Madeira, you know. See, there's Lisbon, then Madeira is about 800 miles away, and then, I don't know how many hundred miles St. Michael is. Then if you keep going down, then you go down to the Azores. I think even Madeira at one time was considered the Azores, you know, of Portugal. And then my mother's side came from Madeira. Matter of fact, my brother and I are going to Madeira, October.

WN: Oh yeah? Nice trip.

AM: Yeah, never been there. My father made his first trip when he was eighty-one.

WN: Is that right?

AM: Yeah. So, you know my dad died at eighty-eight.

WN: So your great-grandfather landed in Kōloa?

AM: Yes, yes, he came to Kōloa. He didn't come as a contract laborer. He came as an independent. And he bought a lot of property in Kōloa. He at one time owned about ninety acres down the beach not too far from where I live. He got that and then he had property over here and he was pretty well independent, you know. And he sort of got rid of the land for favors to the plantation so his sons could go (chuckles) work. That's the old way they did it, you know. When my grandfather worked for the plantation, most of his life he was a supervisor, or division overseer, you know. Most of the Portuguese people all had nicknames. My grandfather was "John Mynah Bird," 'cause he talk like heck.

(Laughter)

AM: And then like my cousin, Mack Medeiros from 'Ōma'o. Because the father lived in Kapa'a, so they called him "Manuel Kapa'a." (Laughs) You know. And then my cousin up Kalāheo, the Pat Medeiros's, the mortician's, grandfather, his name was Joe, so they called him "Joe Fracker" because he was like a firecracker, he made a lot, you know. . . .

(Laughter)

AM: So they get all kinds of names, you know. That's how they

identified the family.

WN: Did you have a nickname?

AM: No, I---well, in high school they called me "Jockey." (Laughs) Only because I used to ride horse all the time. I used to be on the horseback all the time. Because I used to come from 'Ōma'o, as a little boy, on horseback to Kōloa School. After I did all my chores in the morning, like milk the cows and feed the animals, feed the chickens and whatnot, and then my father allowed me to bring the horse because that would make me come faster. And so I can go home faster, too, (laughs) and do the work.

WN: By that time you folks were into ranching?

AM: Yes, yes, cattle.

WN: This was after pineapple, then.

AM: After pineapple, yes. So, that was my high school days.

WN: So, milk the cows, feed the chickens . . .

AM: Feed the chickens.

WN: And what else did you have to do?

AM: Cut the grass, feed the pigs, you know. But my job was mostly for the cows. I used to milk and go cut their grass.

WN: You folks were in commercial ranching?

AM: No, no, no. Just home. Of course, most of our cattle used to be sold to the Filipinos, on-the-hoof type, you know. My father would take me down on a Thursday or Friday, and we'd ride around the pasture--well, pasture was down here. We used to use the plantation pasture also. And . . .

WN: [Manuel R.] Jardin, [Sr.], was that Jardin's pasture?

AM: No, no, McBryde [Plantation]. Medeiros Ranch run it now, but McBryde had it and my father was allowed to put some cattle in there. So we go down and look at it [the cattle]. He'd tell me, "Oh this one, $80. This $100." But when the guys come I'd say, "Well, this one is $90, and this one is [$]115, and this one is so and so forth." Because they always try to Jew you down, you know. But I used to stick to my guns, and my father never worried about it because he knew darned well that I wouldn't get less than what he wanted. I always got more. (Laughs) So that's why towards the---as I was in high school, oh he'd let me make my own decision as to how much I thought would be. So soon as he tell me it's going to be [$]100 I says, "Yeah, okay, I'm going to ask them [$]120." 'Cause if they came down $10, if I give them a break

$10, then we still make $10, (laughs), over. It worked out.

WN: So how many head of---did you folks used to have?

AM: Oh we used to have about a hundred head. Yeah. Between down here and 'Ōma'o. The ones that we took 'Ōma'o, those for milking, you know. And we used to run the cattle right down here and just tie 'em on the horse and take 'em all the way down this pasture. Sometimes one or two at a time. As soon as we found that one was down here that we thought could be good for milk, then we'd, as soon as she'd drop a calf, we'd carry the calf on the saddle, on the horse, and the mother would follow. Yeah, I did that for years. Yeah, those were the days.

(Laughter)

AM: Get any more questions then?

WN: You said that you used to ride your horse to Kōloa School. There was no school in 'Ōma'o?

AM: Well, I only went to 'Ōma'o School just for. . . . Oh my goodness, it must have been about one or two months, I think, or three months at the most. And right after that they closed Kōloa School.

WN: 'Ōma'o School.

AM: 'Ōma'o School. Because there was only one classroom, one room. And then we came to Kōloa. Then they turned that ['Ōma'o School classroom] over to Salvation Army. The Salvation Army had that as a Sunday school. See, that used to be [owned by the] county. And then Vidinha bought that property because he owned adjacent property.

WN: Antone ["Kona"] Vidinha.

AM: Antone ["Kona"] Vidinha's father. The old man [Antone Vidinha, Sr.], he was the sheriff before. Then I think the son took it, bought it from the father.

WN: I see. What grade did you start going to Kōloa School?

AM: First grade.

WN: Oh, first grade.

AM: First grade, yeah. But it was just little while like a receiving class in 'Ōma'o, you know, it was not any formal thing. But then we came over here in Kōloa School.

WN: Where did you leave your horse?

AM: In the back where the cafeteria is now.

WN: Oh, yeah? (Chuckles)

AM: That used to be all wild back there, you know. Nearer to the church used to be the garden. And then way down below used to be the rubbish pile where they burn the rubbish. You could put couple of horses in there, tie 'em on a---you know.

WN: So were you one of the few that had horse?

AM: Yeah. One of the few. Well, the Baptiste boys used to come sometimes on horse. The Kōloa boys never rode horse to school, but we came down.

WN: But was closer, though.

AM: Yeah, so they walked. And any other time we walked, always walked to school.

WN: So what about the other 'Ōma'o boys? After the school closed, they had to come to Kōloa School?

AM: Ah, that was the older. Yeah, as soon as they had more grades down here at Kōloa they just brought them all to Kōloa School. They couldn't keep a teacher up there.

WN: I see. So did they walk?

AM: Yeah, everybody walked. We all walked. Except, as I say, I never brought the horse every day. It was a privilege, you know, to ride the horse. So if you work hard, (chuckles) the old man would say, "Hey, you better take the horse so you can come more early."

(Laughter)

WN: That was like a treat, then?

AM: Yeah, it was a treat because, well, my brothers never cared because they never wanted to go and saddle the horse and unsaddle, you know. And a lot of times I'd get up at four [o'clock] in the morning to start my chores so I'd saddle my father's horse before I'd do anything else, for him to go to work. Because for years, he rode a horse.

WN: Did you folks have hired help?

AM: No, no. No, just the boys. Some would . . .

WN: So like your neighbors, did they more or less do the same thing, ranching?

AM: Yeah. Well see, the Baptiste people started a dairy when I was pretty young, you know, in grammar school. They already had a dairy. The Baptiste Dairy.

WN: A commercial dairy?

AM: Yeah. It delivered milk to the school, and then delivered milk to the store, and they'd go around and deliver to the homes. They had quite a number, yeah, lot of--pretty good-sized dairy.

WN: So they supplied Kōloa with the milk.

AM: Yeah, Kōloa. Well, Kōloa Plantation also had a dairy, you know. And McBryde had a dairy. All the plantations had dairies that I knew of. All the way down the line, for their own people, supply the milk. And they all had a ranch, like McBryde had a big ranch until when they got the trucks in, and then that's when they, well, middle of World War II, I think, gave up the ranch. And the dairy they got rid of before that.

WN: So as kids growing up in that area, what did you folks do to have a good time?

AM: Well, basically we played in the pasture. Played softball or go swimming in the reservoir.

WN: Waitā?

AM: No, 'Ōma'o Reservoir. There was one right across my father's--our place. And that's where we used to gather. Of course our parents never liked it, but we always snuck down, or one of the irrigation ditches, we'd (laughs) block it up and . . .

(Laughter)

AM: And then the ditch man would come up and find out that we'd blocked the water, you know. And we'd make the pond and we'd swim. Then before we leave we'd take out the trash. I know the plantation stopped keeping any [railroad] cars up there, because they used to keep cane cars up, for weekend, you know, from Friday or Saturday. Sunday, they'd find them all down in Kōloa. We'd get on and take off, (laughs) I don't know how we never got killed.

(Laughter)

AM: You know 'Ōma'o Hill is quite a steep one, and we used to come down with the cars.

WN: How fast did it go?

AM: Oh, sometimes you barely made the corner, the one below, but we'd throw the brake on, see. As soon as you'd get it started going downhill, we'd lock the brakes, and let 'em skid all the way down.

(Laughter)

AM: It would just barely roll on its own. But it was fun. All the kids

did that. The plantation had cane not too far below our place, and that was our meeting place. We'd go chew cane, (chuckles) as kids, you know. Go looking for guavas or go looking for wī apples, or . . .

WN: What apples?

AM: Wī apple.

WN: What kind of apple was that?

AM: It starts green, and it's very fibrous inside.

WN: Oh, and small?

AM: Yeah, well, they used to get pretty good. It's good eating. There's a tree right back here, I think.

WN: Oh yeah?

AM: The wī apple. And we used to walk to the beach, you know. Or take a horse to the beach. Sometimes two and three on a horse.

(Laughter)

AM: Those days we had fun, you know. And we always help each other, you know. We used to go and help one another at getting things done so we can take off and go play. Like the dairy, we used to go and help them cut grass, and clean around the dairy, and wash the bottles so then afternoon we would have couple hours of free time to play.

WN: Did you ever get paid for doing that kind of stuff?

AM: Uh uh. No. When I was in grammar school there used to be an old man, Ishii, who used to take care all the ditches. And I used to go help him. So every time he tell me, "Oh, bumbai me dollar makana." And chee, I went home and told my mother the ditchman going to give me dollar, you know, for helping. I used to take my lunch can and take off, go down and help. So payday, he give me ten cents.

I say, "No, but this not one dollar."

He said, "Oh, this dollar."

(Laughter)

AM: "This dollar." (Laughs) That's money, he meant money. He never meant a dollar bill. And we used to help Chinen, the pineapple man, pick or hoe in the pineapples and pick fruit like that, and I did that.

WN: So this Chinen sold the pineapples to Kaua'i Pine[apple Company]?

AM: Kaua'i Pine, yeah. All his pineapple went to Kaua'i Pine. And until they had too much, so cheap. Guys used to go over to Kapa'a because the Kapa'a cannery [Hawaiian Fruit Packers] wasn't taking any fruit, so they would bring some in and try to get them into Kaua'i Pine. And finally, a couple people got in trouble.

WN: So was this like during the depression?

AM: Yes, around that time.

WN: Pineapple got into trouble.

AM: Yeah, got in trouble. And they [Kauai Pine] only would concentrate on the ones that they had contracted with. I know two of them that went up to Kapa'a and brought, at night, they brought (laughs) the pineapple and then took it to the cannery. Well, they finally caught them, and then they stopped taking their pineapple. You know, some hard times during those days.

WN: In 'Ōma'o, was there a town, per se, in 'Ōma'o?

AM: No, no, it was just scattered homes. There was no concentration of homes, you know. But down below as you go from here [Kōloa] to 'Ōma'o, by the first reservoir, there used to be a plantation camp. And it used to be with Koreans. And that's why, if you talk to old-timers, they say, "Go down the Korean Hill," or "Korean Camp." That's where the Koreans lived. And if you go to Kalāheo, there was a Portuguese Camp, and the Japanese Camp, then the Filipino Camp, Chinese Camp. There weren't too many in Chinese Camp.

WN: This is all McBryde [Plantation]?

AM: That was all McBryde. McBryde had, hoo, was it thirty or thirty-two camps throughout the plantation. In fact, that was my job when I went to the plantations, to get rid of the camps. Like Kukui'ula had a large camp, got rid of that. By the Matsuura Store [in Lāwai] had a camp.

WN: How did you get rid of them? I mean . . .

AM: Just sold the houses, moved the people. We offered them homes in another camp, you know, closer to the mill. Yeah, when I went to McBryde in '63 [as Industrial Relations Assistant], that was my first job, was to eliminate camps. So I eliminated Kukui'ula Camp, Lāwa'i Stable Camp, Camp Six, 'Ele'ele Camp, the one down Pump Six, Pump Three, Pump Six Hill. Got rid of all of them. So now the plantation has really just one camp around the mill. The rest are either, they bought their own homes and. . . .

WN: They had to buy their homes elsewhere? They couldn't stay at the same place?

AM: No, no. They had to buy elsewhere. Ah, yeah, with Kalāheo, we

subdivided that place and our people bought.

WN: So, like for things like stores and everything, you had to come to Koloa?

AM: Uh huh. And there was no store in 'Oma'o.

WN: What were some of the stores in Koloa that you remember?

AM: Kaua'i Trading [Company], Ornellas Store, J. I. Silva Store . . .

WN: G?

AM: J. I. Silva, yeah, and then the Koloa Plantation Store later. And then Yamamoto Store, Okumura Store, and later, Sueoka, oh yeah, Yamada had a store. Yamada had a store, too. Well, his was more like liquor store and groceries. Tanaka Store, that was in the camp. Yeah, that was a---oh, Okutsu Store.

WN: Oh, the manjū?

AM: Yeah, oh boy, that was my favorite spot, you know. Go buy manjū early, you know. Oh, and then, well, okay down right here by the school was Nakatsuka Store and Kurasaki Store.

WN: Quite a bit then.

AM: Yeah. Of course, then, Kukui'ula Store, plantation store in Kukui'ula. But the small ones, you know, the ones that we used to frequent were Nakatsuka 'cause they used to make sushi and they used to make things for lunch. You know, those days never had cafeteria, so had to bring our own lunch. So we'd run across the street, and she, Mrs. Kurasaki, used to make terrific bread, you know.

WN: Oh yeah?

AM: Yeah, we go and buy bread from her.

WN: I wonder, did your mother make bread in the oven?

AM: Yeah, mm hmm.

WN: So what was that like?

AM: Well, my mother never made it except on occasion when we used to go up my grandmother's place and use her oven, outside. You know, the regular oven. But my mother cooked it at home with a kerosene oven. My grandaunt used to cook a lot, Mrs. Costa. She made a lot of sweet bread. And whenever we wanted, we'd come down here to Koloa to my grandfather's place, they had an outside oven. It's still there, in fact, but it's overgrown with a banyan tree. I wish it wasn't because then I would use it. (Chuckles) But, interesting, you know. And yet, I helped somebody build one in Kapa'a, and we

used it for a while. And I learned when I was very young how to light the stove, you know. For my grandmother, I used to go light 'em up and make 'em ready when it's real hot, and test it.

WN: You throw the flour inside?

AM: Yeah, well, you mop 'em first, clean. You know, mop, take up all the ashes first, and then you mop 'em with a damp mop, then you throw the [flour]. Leave it little while and then throw the [flour], if gets too hot, then mop 'em again. You know, until it turns brown a little slower. And then you put the bread inside.

WN: This is a brick oven?

AM: Well, not brick, used to be rock, but it was all sealed. It was thick. So when that thing got hot, it stayed hot for a long time. You could just about cook two batches, you know. Then you have to light 'em up again. Get it hot again and then go over that same process.

WN: So when you were young, what other foods did you eat besides bread?

AM: Oh. In our house because we had so many children, we had a lot of soups. Rice, meats--well, my mother always tried to provide with soups, with stews, something that would last, you know, could go long ways. We used to come to Kōloa every Saturday, buy the meat. I used to come on a horse, pick up the meat from Old Man Ono.

WN: From, was that the . . .

AM: Plantation. Way up, you know, meat market. Got so to a point where Old Man [S.] Ono took a liking to me, and every time he would give me extra. The bones like that he would---and most of the bones those days, plenty meat on, eh? So I'd take those bones and I'd go down (chuckles) to the corral and dig the hole, light the fire, and make <u>laulau</u>, you know. (Laughs) Every week, I'd make <u>laulau</u>, yeah. And it come out good. There wasn't very much meat, but, you know. You put salt on the meat and then you make <u>laulau</u>. Good fun, yeah?

WN: (Laughs) So this was before you folks had the ranch? You'd go to the meat market.

AM: No, we had the ranch, but because there's no refrigeration, so you don't keep stuff too long. And I remember one time when we were young. Maybe my father would have somebody kill a pig for us, and then my mother would salt it. Put 'em in one of those crocks, and just put 'em in layers of salt, and brine. And that's what we . . .

WN: And it would keep for long?

AM: Yeah, it'll keep, it'll keep almost indefinitely if you don't touch around it. Just the salt will keep it. Of course, the meat would get dark color, (chuckles) you know, 'cause stay there long time,

yeah?

WN: How often would you kill a cow?

AM: Well, surprisingly, my father never killed too many for home use. He always sold it out and then got some meat back, or just bought the meat as we needed. My father wasn't one for doing his own slaughtering. Well, he couldn't even castrate. You know, he wouldn't castrate. He couldn't kill a chicken. He wouldn't, you know. I used to do it for him. Rabbits, chickens, all my father's cattle. Yeah, none of my brothers knew how to castrate. I castrated. I must have castrated 3,000 head.

WN: How do you castrate a cow?

AM: Well, just, you know, it hangs and then, the cow is tipped over and you pull the skin and you cut 'em, then you take 'em and you squeeze 'em, and then you take the knife and you cut the testicle one at a time. Then you squeeze the inside of that and you scrape it until it comes off. Then you take the other one the same way, and scrape 'em. Then you get, well, we used to use Lysol or Purline those days to keep the flies out. Make sure it bleeds, see. If it bleeds, okay. If it doesn't bleed, sometimes a week later the bugger get big, eh? Then you got to knock 'em again and cut 'em, bleed 'em out. But that time you can't stay there too long. (Laughs) You know, it gets smelly. But, I used to help deliver calves.

WN: Yeah?

AM: Oh yeah, gee. Sometime they come breeched, eh? So you got to go there and turn 'em, and then let 'em drop. Then sometime they drop the calf, and the baby bag hangs out. So you got to go there and pull 'em out slow, you know, so get 'em out. 'Cause otherwise, if you let 'em on, like that, the cow swings the tail and (AM makes swishing noise), slaps you in the face. (Laughs) But you get used to that, you know? But yet, when I tell my kids that they can't believe it.

WN: (Laughs) I was wondering, when you folks would go to, say, the Kōloa meat market or the plantation store, were you folks able to charge . . .

AM: Yeah.

WN: . . . if you weren't [employed by] Kōloa Plantation?

AM: Well, those days there was always delivery, you know. The plantation stores used to deliver. So, like, Kōloa Plantation Store used to deliver to all the plantation people. And then the Jardin Market and the Costa Store in Kalāheo, they opened, and they would have delivery boys. Once a week, the delivery boy would come, or sometimes twice a week, whatever. Then they take the orders, and then they bring the stuff. Then at the end of the month, you pay

'em. All used to be charge before. What they use now is MasterCards; they used to be the old charge system. And, if you were with, say, McBryde, or Kōloa Plantation, the plantation would just deduct it from your pay.

WN: But I was wondering, if your father was McBryde and you folks bought from Kōloa, how would they deduct?

AM: Well, then we had to pay at the end of the month, or pay cash. You establish credit, and if you didn't pay one or two months, then they stop you, and the delivery boy would be at your house once a week, make sure that you pay. And you wouldn't have too many of those people, the old-timers not paying their bill. Most of them lived within their means. Whereas after that, there were some stores would build up. When my father folks took over the Costa Store in Kalāheo, in the '40s, they finally had to close it, there was so many people owing them, you know. Never worried about paying.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: So you were saying that while you were going to school, during the summers you worked for Kaua'i Pine, in the cannery?

AM: Well, I first worked for McBryde [Sugar Plantation] when I was eleven years old.

WN: What did you do?

AM: What we call kālai, weeding and huki lepo, which is building up, hilling up the lines, the furrows; planting, plant cane. Then after that, I used to go hāpai kō in the harvesting field. You know, I was small, but we used to carry the cane up that little ladder [to the cane car], one (laughs) about eight inches wide, not even six inches wide. Take off of there. Yeah then, after that, I used to go change horses for the supervisors. Instead of them running all the way to the stable, I would take the horse for them, change, get another horse, and come back.

WN: Oh, that's a good job.

AM: Oh, that is the best job!

(Laughter)

AM: And I was water boy, too.

WN: Water boy, meaning giving the workers water?

AM: Giving, yeah, water. In the gang. They were working, the hāpai kō

gang, you just take water to them.

WN: What did you take the water in?

AM: Cans. About three-gallon-type cans, two cans. They all drank from the same cup. (Laughs) No problem, they never found diseases in those days. Let's see, what else, then. After that, well, when I went high school, then I went to Kaua'i Pine.

WN: In the [cane] fields, what was your pay?

AM: Well, McBryde?

WN: Yeah.

AM: When I first started, I got fifty-five cents a day [i.e., boy wages]. And the only reason I got fifty-five cents was my younger brother, the one next to me, was getting fifty cents. Because he was younger, he got five cents less. It wasn't because I was a better worker or anything else, it was just that because I was older, you see, they gave me a little bit more, five cents a day more. My mother would say that I ate more than (laughs) I brought home.

(Laughter)

AM: Yeah, we used to have a strict luna.

WN: Oh, yeah? Do you remember his name?

AM: Oh, yeah. The name was Sam Kane. Old Man Sam Kane. In fact his daughter, she used to be Emily Kane, and she became Mrs. Smith. And they own that Smith's Boat Tours [Smith's Motor Boat Service, Inc.], going up the Wailua River. And that was our first luna. Guy's a big man, (laughs) strict like heck.

(Laughter)

AM: Boy, just one growl from him, and you jump five feet.

(Laughter)

AM: Yeah. In fact he used to go to work, lot of times, barefooted, the old man. He never worried about shoes, he'd walk barefooted.

WN: How did you get to the fields from your house?

AM: We used to walk or my father used to take us. My father at that time had one pickup and we'd go to work. We had to come down here to Panau, here, down by the [Koloa] School. That was the assembly point. And we'd walk most of the time.

WN: Fifty-five cents a day.

AM: They used to keep us in this area. And they never used to take us too far. And if we had 'Ele'ele, we'd take the train from here, and the cars go down and they bring us back in the afternoon. Drop us off here and then we'd walk up. Let's see now, then I'd say after that I went to Kaua'i Pine.

WN: What did you do there?

AM: Well, I was tray boy when Ike [Okamura] folks used to stack cans. I worked in the warehouse, I worked in the platform. After high school I stayed with Kaua'i Pine for a while.

WN: So when you first worked in the cannery, how much did you get paid?

AM: I think it was about twenty-five cents an hour.

WN: So, much more than what you were making out in the . . .

AM: Yeah, yeah. The cannery was already industrialized, you know. And once you became fifteen, sixteen [years old], well, I think was maybe twenty or twenty-five cents an hour. Yeah, I think so, I think it was that.

WN: And they had Ginaca machine, and . . .

AM: Oh yeah. Ginaca machine. I worked there awhile, then McBryde offered me a job in the office. So I went to McBryde office for one year. Then after that I went to the army, in 1940. Then came back and went back to McBryde for another year, then I left McBryde and went to the national guard for the state. I was a military clerk. Then I became the administrative assistant for the national guard. Then I was a recruiting officer, and then I was supply officer, then I was company commander, adjutant. I spent twenty-three years. Then 1952 I went to Kaua'i Pine as the assistant personnel director. And I worked with Katsumi Tanimoto.

WN: Oh, Charles?

AM: Charlie, Charlie Tanimoto. Yeah, to this day he and I are the best of friends. And then he left Kaua'i Pine, and I got elected to the state legislature [in 1959]. And for a while he was selling massage equipment. Then when I got elected I took him to the legislature as my secretary. And then when we made the contacts, I pushed for him to get a job with the state labor department, and he worked there until he retired. And so, one time he was my boss; next time I was his boss.

(Laughter)

AM: But, we are the best of friends, you know.

WN: He's a really nice guy.

AM: Charlie and I got along real well. Never once, the guy, he ever told me that he was my boss. Or never once when I was in legislature, told him I was his boss, you know. It was just mutual admiration for each other.

WN: He wrote a book, huh?

AM: Yeah, he wrote a book, [Return to] Māhā'ulepū. Yeah, and he mentions me in the book. (Laughs)

WN: Oh, that's neat. I think that's where my wife heard your name. (Laughs)

AM: Maybe, maybe. And if she went to the library, she probably saw something about reorganizing the national guard and all that, and maybe that's where she heard of me. And . . .

WN: So, McBryde--you go ahead.

AM: No, no, go.

WN: McBryde Sugar and Kaua'i Pine were the same company?

AM: They were owned by Alexander & Baldwin. Yeah, see, Kaua'i Pine was a division of Alexander & Baldwin. Pineapple division. Whereas, McBryde is a separate corporation.

WN: So when you were there and Ike was there, you folks were working same place?

AM: Yeah. I used to be tray boy for him. He and his brother, all the old gang.

WN: You were the tray boy?

AM: Yeah.

WN: So what was . . .

AM: Stacker. Contract, they used to stack the cans.

WN: And you used to take the whole thing?

AM: No, no, no. The empty trays. I just stacked, pile up the empty trays and keep giving them the stacks with the hand car. Go and stack it right by them so we can go home early. But this bugger was lazy like hell.

(Laughter)

AM: No, it was---in fact, that's how I met Ike. The first time, yeah. And we've been friends since. But I don't know about him, though.

(Laughter)

WN: Ike's shaking his head, no.

(Laughter)

WN: So after the war, in '52 you went back to Kaua'i Pine as assistant personnel officer?

AM: Yeah.

WN: Until the cannery closed [in 1965], yeah?

AM: Yeah.

WN: Why did the cannery have to close?

AM: Well, basically foreign competition. Costs, labor costs, was too much. That was one of the first pineapple companies to get unionized. Kaua'i Pine was one of the earlier ones. [In May 1939, UCAPAWA Local 76 organized the nonagricultural workers at Kaua'i Pineapple Company.]

WN: That's right, yeah.

AM: They started what, 19. . . . Was it '37 [1939]?

WN: Mm hmm.

AM: That's when, I think, they started organizing, and '37, '38, '39, that's why I left. Because they were calling a strike and they told us to get out. And I told the guy, "No, I'm not going to get out." I says, "You not going to pay my (chuckles) wages, I'm going to stay." I was not in the union, you know, I was just a kid. So then afterwards I decided, well, I'll go McBryde (chuckles). And I've never been a member of the union. Of course, I have great respect for the union and I worked very closely with them, but I've never been a union member.

WN: Do you remember who some of the leaders were of that early unionizing effort?

AM: Oh, yeah. John Brun, Fat Komaki--Yoshio, eh, his name?

Ike: Yeah.

AM: Yoshio Komaki, yeah.

WN: B-R-U-N?

AM: B-R-U-N, yeah.

WN: So after the cannery closed, you went over to McBryde?

AM: Yeah. [AM actually left Kaua'i Pine for McBryde Sugar Company twice: the first time in 1939, because of the strike previously discussed and again in 1963, when Kaua'i Pine was closing down operations. WN's question refers to the second time.]

WN: What were you there?

AM: Industrial relations assistant. They just transferred me over. Out of all of the Kaua'i Pine employees, there were only two that were transferred. Others were given severance pay. And although they may have gone to, say, McBryde or other places, only Noboru Moriwaki and myself were the only two that were given jobs without severance, you know. So our service continued under A&B, so I ended up with almost thirty-five years with A&B.

WN: So while you were working for McBryde, in '73 ['74] they took over Kōloa from Grove Farm, I think. Do you remember any changes at that time?

AM: In which way, what do you mean here?

WN: Management, or . . .

AM: Well, no, McBryde kept their management. Oh, McBryde took over 7,200 acres of Grove Farm land, and we brought in something like 250 Grove Farm employees. I know there was some problem, they wanted some kind of seniority along with them. Finally they decided that that's the way they were going to go. And, of course, some of the McBryde people didn't like that, because they were taking over, and the Grove Farm guys saying, "Well, I got forty years, or thirty-five years, I'm senior." But it worked out. They worked it out with the union. And, of course, it meant that we were one mill. And being that this [Kōloa] Mill---not that this mill was any better, it was more centralized.

WN: To Kōloa, you mean?

AM: Yeah. So, they decided to close the 'Ele'ele Mill, and consolidate.

WN: Were they the same size?

AM: Well, that one [i.e. 'Ele'ele] had a bigger mill, per se, but at that time there was a lot of pressure about waste water. And it became very difficult to keep that one, because of the. . . . Where were you going to put the waste water? We weren't too far from the ocean. And, as I just said, it was not centrally located. If, I think, it was centrally located, they would have kept that one [i.e. 'Ele'ele]. But the agreement was that we would take over that [Kōloa] Mill, but we weren't about to operate two mills at that time. McBryde worked that out, too.

WN: So, what's the situation now, with McBryde, is it they're leasing the land from Grove Farm?

AM: Yes.

WN: And the [Kōloa] Mill?

AM: And the mill. Leased it. Land and the mill.

WN: So even the cane lands that Kōloa Sugar didn't own, like the Knudsen land, is still leased?

AM: Yeah. We got some Grove Farm land, and some Knudsen land. The land in Kōloa, Knudsen land. And then the other land going the other side used to be Wilcox land, and there's Grove Farm land, and so we've got that.

WN: What changes have taken place in 'Ōma'o, since the time you were a kid to like, today?

AM: (Chuckles) There's a lot of changes, and not the road or anything else, but the people. Gosh, today there's more. . . . Well, there's a lot of Haoles living in--so-called Haoles--living in 'Ōma'o. At one time there were more Portuguese. Then after that, the Puerto Ricans came. There were very few Filipinos and there were very few Japanese. And, as I say, other than the Otas, the Shintanis, the Hiramotos, the Okamuras, the Lees, that was about all the Japanese in there. You know, that I remember.

WN: Lee?

AM: Lee. Korean. Yeah, Korean family. And then now you go to 'Ōma'o, and. . . . I don't even know who they are.

WN: Mostly Haole?

AM: Yeah.

WN: From the Mainland?

AM: Yeah, well, from the Mainland. Since they developed that land, Vidinha's land, a lot of new faces in there. And then up at the other side, there's big difference. Before, homes were just scattered.

WN: Are they building a lot more?

AM: Oh yeah. They're still going. Building all over. Because, see, even on my father's property they're now building, the upper portion, there's one, two, three, four, five, six. And then the Kaneshiros bought, you know. My brother sold his property, so there's two different owners in there already.

WN: They're leasing from your father?

AM: No, no, no, no, no. My father, when he died, he gave it to us and

my brothers, two of my brothers sold their property. Sold their acres. So there's new people, and below that, gosh, the Baptiste's, it's all homes in there now. Never used to be. And then further down, the Pi'imoku place, they got several homes in there. Hoo. But tremendous change. And yet they haven't widened the road, or lined the road anymore from the time when I lived there. No, I think Kaua'i is in trouble, politically. With the politicians for not getting the roads. Some of these things should have been done ten years ago. And I can't blame any particular individual, but this is our problem.

WN: So there's a lot of growth, but then yet the infrastructures is . . .

AM: That's right. Infrastructure is not in there. And this is what we should have had done as we went along.

WN: What about Kōloa, what changes have you witnessed in Kōloa and Po'ipū?

AM: Oh, again. (Laughs) Hundredfold, you know. At one time, my cousin and I were the only two people living up on the Crater Hill, we're the first two. On the other side used to be the Waterhouse [beach home], Sinclair, and all those guys. And now it's shoulder to shoulder. Well, Po'ipū has developed faster than anyplace else in the island. You know in the last fifteen years, Po'ipū has grown from a little, quiet, beach town to a resort, complete resort.

WN: How did the developers acquire the Po'ipū land?

AM: Money talk, I guess. You know, as I say, when I bought my land from [Antone "Kona"] Vidinha, I paid twenty-and-a-half cents a square foot. Today it's worth thirty-five dollars. So that's the way it goes.

WN: What do you think the future of this area is? What do you envision in the next, say, fifty years?

AM: Fifty years? Be a metropolitan area. (Laughs) Fifty years. I say even in twenty years, you wouldn't recognize Koloa. (Whistle blows in background.) If that [mill] whistle stops blowing, there'll be no sugar, then only God knows what's this place going be. Because it's not going to be a dead town. Because of the sugar company in this area, it's going to be a lot of land available, either for development or ranch land, you know. Can't have everybody raising cattle or horses. They got to do something with it. And they talk about diversification and diversified crops, and. . . . I don't see it for Kaua'i.

WN: Why not?

AM: Well, they've tried guava before, and it didn't work much. They tried corn, you know the one they have in Hanapēpē and Waimea, in a very small scale. Kīlauea had it, and it went down. They tried

prawns, they went out the window. You know, it's the market. No more market. And lot of it, I blame the farmer. Farmer John grows corn. So does Joe, Johnny, and Frank, and Doral and everybody else, huh? They grow the same thing.

And I keep mentioning to people, even in my political years, get an agricultural coordinator. And you know, they should. The University of Hawai'i going to tell you, "Hey, get this good crop for this time of the year." But they got to get somebody who can say, "Hey, don't grow this now. You grow this at. . . ." But nobody likes to be told what to do. Farmer doesn't want to be told. But if he's wise, he would listen to maybe a good coordinator, one who knows crops. To grow that crop so he can make money. You know. I'm a firm believer that if you can't make profit, you can't pay your bills. You can't pay wages. The company or the person investing and doing things must be able to make a profit so he can pay out the wages. I mean this is all it boils down to. You can't kill the goose that laid the golden egg.

WN: So you see what, houses and hotels, you know?

AM: Well, I don't foresee too many more hotels in here, without. . . . I see another golf course down here as a recreation facility. I see a lot more homes where individuals are going to buy, I'm sure. I'm sure it's going to be, in the upper areas going to be tract subdivisions, you know. But, for jobs. . . . More homes you put, I would think, my personal feelings, that less visitors will come.

WN: Is that good or bad?

AM: Well, it's bad for the economy if they don't come. And what I'm afraid of is the so-called retired and semi-retired people. If you have a greater percentage of them around than the so-called working people, where's your revenues coming from, other than from the real property? And it shouldn't be, you know. Most of them are retired from, say from the Mainland. They come down here, they don't pay. Except for the real property tax, they don't pay any more. And then, well, maybe the food that they buy, but they not making that money to go around.

WN: So what do you think the chances of sugar are of surviving?

AM: I think in my lifetime, sugar will still be here. You know, in my lifetime, and possibly yours, I think still it's going to be around. But it's going to be squeezed. Because you know, Waialua [Sugar Company on O'ahu] going out is not helping. And places like McBryde, I'm sure they're looking at other things, even they're looking at coffee. But I can't see 12,000 or 14,000 acres of coffee in this region. Macadamia nuts is a luxury commodity, like pineapple. So it can't last. Coffee is something that more people can take than eating macadamia nuts (chuckles) or pineapple. I don't know, it's going to be rough. And I'm sure that sugar people are very aware of that. And the worst situations are when the owners are not from here. A&B

will try their darndest to keep McBryde going. But if you have too many people not from here controlling it, man, they can decide to close this place, so they (stomps foot) get rid of it. Put the money, develop the land, and put it to something else, some other use.

I think small manufacturing units could be done here. Something that you do not have to go through an agricultural inspection thing. Because you know, like the papaya, we're having trouble with Japan. You have that even with California. And if they don't take it, then what? The market be flooded, so. . . . Any more questions?

WN: Well, I'm going to turn it off. If you have any last things to say about yourself, your life, or Kōloa. . . .

AM: No, no. That seems to be what Kaua'i used to be, (chuckles) as I remember it.

WN: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

AM: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

KŌLOA: An Oral History of a Kaua'i Community

VOLUME I

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